

# **A Tale of Cookies and City Council**

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“Growing Up on Vashon”  
by Lauri Hennessey  
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Spring Break. The bell rings. The kids come bombing out of the building, ready for a week of traveling, playing, or just lying around. That was the scene at Chautauqua on the Friday before Spring Break. The kids left that building before you could say “boo”, ready for the week ahead.

Unless, of course, their moms are friends of mine. If so, it's a good chance you found them headed to the city to tour Seattle City Hall.

Last Spring I bid in the Washington Conservation Voters Auction for two distinct privileges: one was lunch with Seattle City Council Member Jean Godden. (And it was a blast!) The other was a tour of City Hall, questions and answers, cookies and milk and more with City Council Member Peter Steinbrueck.

As luck would have it, I couldn't find a class that could make the trip over to Seattle as a field trip. So, I managed to plan it for some friends of mine and their kids, and we arranged it on the early release day before Spring Break. And what a day it was.

Council Member Steinbrueck was a good sport, especially since he had a pretty broad range of kids (Kindergarten to 4<sup>th</sup> grade), and attention wandered a bit. The kids were a bit excited. Add to that my precocious daughter Emma's questions (“How much do you get paid?”) and I was pretty impressed how he handled it all.

He talked about recycling, and about green buildings and living sustainably. He talked about what government does for you, and even described the three branches of government and what each one does!

It turns out Steinbrueck has been donating the tours to auctions for seven years now. Why?

“I think out kids should care about what we do – our services, our neighborhoods. I think the emphasis in school is on the federal government, not the local government,” he said.

"I get great benefit from doing this. It helps me stay in touch with what kids care about," he said.

In fact, Steinbrueck told me that one time a kid told him in one of these sessions that he was worried about his skate park, and how a land deal being discussed between the City and the Gates Foundation could do away with the park. Steinbrueck was able to write in to the deal that there would be a public process, so that the kids would have a chance to come and talk about the park.

As for our trip, I hate to tell you, nothing quite so lofty happened. But the kids had a blast. They loved the feeling of sitting around the Council's table ("I liked it when we sat around the table. It made me feel important," said Katherine Misel.). They learned a bit of something about the environment. They learned about what makes elected officials important ("I knew he was important. He was wearing a suit," said Emma Hennessey.)

As we toured City Hall, I found myself looking around the place with some whimsical thoughts in my head. I remember when I worked in Washington, D.C., none of us were very fond of the tourists. It was strange when the visitors or the children came walking through Capitol Hill, staring at the staff, whispering, asking for tours. "Come on, folks! I'm working here!" (At least, I often dreamed of saying that.)

And I remember that by the time you had met hundreds of people visiting Washington, D.C., people all too often standing in the shadow of the Washington Monument and asking me, "Where is the Washington Monument?", you grew a bit cynical about it all.

Then today, I toured City Hall with my kids, my friends, and a Member of the Seattle City Council. I oohed. I ahed. We snapped photos.

And somehow, seeing these kids get their first taste of public office? It kind of made it all exciting again.

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"Growing Up on Vashon" runs every month in the Beachcomber. Lauri Hennessey has her own public relations business, raises three children, and would like nothing better than if one of her kids grew up to be Peter Steinbrueck. You can reach her at [Lauri@hennesseypr.com](mailto:Lauri@hennesseypr.com)

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